

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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Hateful column further poisons body politic

Monday, April 1, 2002

By MARK SHIELDS
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

According to Bill Maher, the host of ABC's "Politically Incorrect," in attorney-columnist Ann Coulter, "the conservative movement has found its diva."

This is how one recent Coulter column titled "Mineta's Bataan Death March" began. Citing "buoyant reports," she wrote, "enraged travelers rose up in a savage attack on the secretary of transportation. Hope was dashed later when reports indicated that the travelers were actually rival warlords, the airport was the Kabul Airport and Norman Mineta was still with us."

Was this just Coulter's lame effort at sick humor? Judge for yourself.

In the same column, she writes that "among President Bush's dazzling team of advisers," Norm Mineta is "the only stinkbomb" -- a man who has been "given plumb government jobs solely and exclusively because he is a minority. But Secretary Mineta is burning with hatred for America. He has taken the occasion of the most devastating attack on U.S. soil to drone on about how his baseball bat was taken from him as a child headed to one of Franklin Roosevelt's Japanese internment camps."

By enforcing President Bush's unequivocal ("It is wrong and we will end it in America") opposition to ethnic and racial profiling, and by imposing additional security measures that do inconvenience air travelers, Mineta is, according to Coulter, "subjecting all of America to the Bataan Death March!"

I do not know Coulter. I do know Mineta. And I do know hateful, hurtful, dumb and irresponsible when I see it. And that is exactly the column Coulter has written.

Mineta is a Democrat, and he was the first non-white elected to the San Jose City Council and the first Asian American elected mayor of a major U.S. city, before winning 11 consecutive elections to the U.S. House.

In the House, according to the conservative scholar Michael Barone, Mineta regularly was "singled out for important assignments by the leadership" because so "many members rely on his judgment and opinions."

In charging that Mineta was promoted by those who knew him only or primarily because he was Japanese American, Coulter is both wrong and hurtful.

Yes, as a 10-year-old wearing his Scout uniform, Mineta was shipped off to an internment camp where the U.S. government incarcerated West Coast Japanese Americans after they lost their businesses, their homes and their dignity. "I could see the machine guns and the barbed wire faced inward," Mineta has said.

It was at that camp in Wyoming where young Mineta became friends with young Alan Simpson, who

would grow up to serve three terms in the U.S. Senate from Wyoming.

Simpson has recalled thinking to himself, as a young kid, that the government had not incarcerated German Americans or Italian Americans because "we couldn't identify them. We did it only to the Japanese Americans because we could identify them."

Forty-six years later, Republican Simpson and Democrat Mineta would collaborate in Congress to pass the redress bill that offered an official apology and compensation to the surviving victims of the internment camps.

After graduating from Berkeley, Mineta served three years in the U.S. Army in Korea and Japan in intelligence. As Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., a former colleague, puts it: "Given what Japanese Americans endured, it is a tribute that they love this country so much. Nobody I have ever known loves America more than Mineta does." Coulter's "burning with hatred for America" line is totally reprehensible and totally irresponsible.

The Bataan Death March in 1942 was an act of contemptible cruelty by the Imperial Army of Japan, a 55-mile forced march of U.S. and Filipino prisoners of war deprived of food and water in scalding heat, during which thousands perished.

For Coulter to trivialize the service and the suffering of those brave soldiers at Bataan by comparing their ordeal to an extra 20 minutes in line at the airport is offensively stupid. To use Mineta's name in the same sentence with the Bataan Death March is hateful.

A friend asked if by writing this I wasn't simply giving Coulter's malicious attacks on Mineta, a good man, more circulation. Accepting ugly lies -- without rebuttal -- is truly like pumping heroin into the bloodstream, however. That poison never completely leaves. Our body politic already has too much poison.

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